

False Alarm Fee Changes for 2011

Automated (Burglar)	\$115
Activated (Panic/Duress/Robbery)	\$230

The City of Seattle is updating its false alarm fees to bring them in line with actual expenditures. The current \$90 fee was implemented in 2005 and has remained at that level despite increased program costs and inflation.

Beginning January 1, 2011, the City of Seattle will use a new fee structure for billing false burglar and panic alarms. The new fees will be \$115 for a false burglar alarm and \$230 for a false panic/duress/robbery alarm. These changes were unanimously approved by the Seattle City Council as part of its recent biennial budget process.

The fee for an alarm cancelled after the officer has been dispatched (but prior to arrival) has not changed, and will remain \$30.

Panic/duress/robbery alarms consist of approximately 10% of the false alarms that have a police response and about half of these are from commercial businesses. Given their nature, these calls require a higher priority police response and typically utilize more resources than the average burglar alarm call. Panic/duress/robbery alarms thus involve greater liability for the City and, unlike false burglar alarms, there is no policy in place to deal with locations that have chronic false panic alarms (a 'no response' provision). Approximately 97% of all alarms reported to police for dispatch are false. In addition, the false alarm rate for panic/duress/robbery alarms is almost identical to the false alarm rate for burglar alarms. The False Alarm Unit has noted that other jurisdictions in the greater Seattle area have established separate fees for burglar and panic alarms, assigning a higher fee to false panic alarms.

In lieu of activating a panic/duress/robbery alarm, the Seattle Police Department encourages alarm owners to report crimes by calling 9-1-1. This puts you directly in contact with police dispatch and allows you to provide vital information for responding officers. Activating a panic/duress/robbery alarm, instead of calling 9-1-1, provides little information to responding officers about the nature of the alarm and allows precious minutes to elapse before the police are aware that a priority response is necessary. It can take up to 10 minutes before police dispatch is even aware that a panic alarm was tripped.

If you have any further questions about the fee changes, you may contact Det. Mark Vwich at 206-684-9201 or Terry Boyle (FAS-RCP) at 206-684-8406.